

Letter written to Philipp Melanchthon,¹

written from Erfurt,

27th March 1522

To the Christian man Philipp Melanchthon, professor of the sacred scriptures, from Thomas Müntzer, messenger of Christ.

Greetings, instrument of Christ. I embrace your theology with all my heart, for it has rescued many souls of the elect from the traps of the hunters. I am pleased that your priests are now taking wives to themselves, for then the Roman deceits will no longer constrain you; but what I disapprove of is this – that you worship a dumb God: because of your ignorance about propagation, you cannot tell the difference between the elect and the reprobate; and so you have rejected the future church in which the knowledge of God will arise like the sun in its splendour. For your error, best beloved, comes from a complete ignorance of the living word. Have a look at the scriptures, by which we endeavour to keep the world in its place: here it says quite clearly – man does not live by bread alone, but by all the words which proceed from the mouth of God; see – emerging from the mouth of God, and not from books. It is merely the testimony to those true words which can be found in books. For unless it arises in the heart, it is only the word of Man; this condemns the treacherous scribes who steal the holy oracles, Jeremiah 23. Never once did the Lord speak to them, and yet they usurp his words.

Oh, best beloved, make every effort to prophesy, or else your theology will not be worth a penny. You must consider your God to be near at hand and not far distant, you must believe that God will talk to you more willingly than you are prepared to listen. We are full of desires. This prevents the living finger [of God] from writing upon his tablets. Your arguments will drag men into marriage; but the bed does not remain undefiled, but is rather a Satanic brothel; and this is even more harmful to the church than the most pestilential ointments of the priests. Do the passions of these desires not impede your sanctification? How can the spirit be poured out upon your flesh, how can you have living speech with God, if you still deny these things? There is no commandment (if I may put it this way)

¹ In the original, this letter was written entirely in Latin (except for two sentences, noted below). The original letter is lost, but Johann Agricola published a version of it as an appendix to his critique of Müntzer, *Auslegung des 19. Psalms*, printed in Wittenberg, 1525.

which binds the Christian more tightly than our sanctification. It first empties the spirit by the will of God, for it cannot allow the delights which are lower than the spirit to take false possession: we must make use of wives just as if we did not have them. Give what is due to them, not for the sake of the race, but so that the knowledge of God speaks to you, commands you and advises you, and you come to know more confidently when it is time for an elect child. Thus, the fear of God and the spirit of wisdom will come in the way of brute lustfulness, so that in the end you are not swallowed up.

The phial of the third angel (I know and I fear) has already been poured into the fountain of the waters and all the outpouring of blood has been completed - aye, but their understanding remains with the flesh and the blood. Certain people are elect, but their understanding cannot be opened for the reasons we have mentioned above. So their works are just the same as those of reprobates, except that they possess the fear of God, which is all that distinguishes them. Two people lie in one bed, and they follow the same desire. For I find such works in you, as long as there are arguments amongst you about abolishing the Mass. I extol and commend those among you who detest the abomination of the Papist sacrifice; they have acted under the guidance of the holy spirit. But they remain entangled in error because they have not adopted the rites of the apostles in every detail. For those who have scattered their seminal fluid at the Lord's command are obliged to tremble; preachers ought to examine their listeners when they have finished speaking, and those who display the fruits of understanding should be set before other men, and the bread and the drink given to them. For they are in possession of this truth, to whom understanding has been given by the testimonies of God, not from the dead letters in books but from living promises.

Our very beloved Martin acts in ignorance because he does not want to offend the lowly, even though the lowly today are just like those accursed boys who lived to be a hundred years old ². But the anguish of Christians is already upon us, and I do not know why you should consider that it is yet to come. Dear brothers, stop your dreaming: it is time! ³ Delay no longer, the summer is at the door. Do not make any peace with the reprobates, for they will obstruct the mighty working of the word. Do not pander to your princes, or else you will see all your works subverted, may our blessed God prevent it. If you deny that purgatory is part of Christianity, then you show yourselves to be ignorant both of scripture

² Reference to Isaiah 65,20.

³ This sentence in German in the original.

and of the knowledge of the spirit; but I commend you for rejecting the Papist fantasies. No one may achieve rest unless the seven stages of reason have been opened up to the seven spirits. It is an abominable error to deny Purgatory, so beware! If you wish it, then I can corroborate all that I say from scriptures, from the order of Creation, from experience and from the clear word of God. You precious scholars, do not resist – I can do nothing else. ⁴

Farewell, on the fifth day after the Annunciation. Thomas Müntzer, messenger of Christ.

Pay no attention to the god of Ekron, your Lang⁵; for he is a reprobate who has persecuted the servant of God as a result of his immortal pride.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
March 2016)*

⁴ This sentence is in German in the original.

⁵ This is a reference to Johann Lang, professor of Greek at Erfurt University and one of Luther's close associates; it would appear that he and Müntzer had fallen out. The 'god of Ekron' is a reference to Baalzebub, in 2 Kings 1, 2.